

A NEW SPECIES OF LEPIDAGATHIS (ACANTHACEAE) FROM KERALA, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

A new species, *Lepidagathis balakrishnanii* Remadevi et Binoj, K., is described and illustrated from Kerala, India. It differs from its allied species *Lepidagathis spinosa* Wight in having glabrous and mucronate leaves, short peduncle and glandular bracts.

INTRODUCTION

Acanthaceae, is one of the largest families of flowering plants, comprising of approximately 256 genera and 2765 species, mostly in the tropical parts of the World and to some extending in temperate regions. In India, species belonging to this family occur mostly in the mountains in the south and west India and a few are in the tropical and subtropical Himalayas. The taxonomic status of this family is far from clear and various taxa are not yet finally delimited. This offers a formidable challenge to taxonomist and leads to the revisionary studies of this family for Kerala State. The study results in the identification of several interesting taxa and several being turned as new to science. One among these *Lepidagathis balakrishnanii* is described here as new species.

Lepidagathis balakrishnanii Remadevi et Binoj Kumar *sp. nov.* (Fig 1 A-E)

Valde affinis *Lepidagathis spinosa* Wight. affinis, sed differt folia glabra, inflorescentia semper terminalis, 0.5-1.5 cm longa, spicis 2-4, bracteae glanduloso pilosae.

Type : India : Kerala, Changanacherry, Perunna, 14-12-2000, Remadevi 210A (Holotype MH), 210B-C (Isotypes SDCH).

Herbs, prostrate to straggling, 15-25 cm high, rooting at nodes; stems subterete, glabrous, internodes 1.5-2.5 cm long. Leaves lanceolate-elliptic, cuneate at base, mucronate at apex, serrate or wavy along margins, 1.5-2.5 x 1.5-2 cm, glabrous; lateral nerves 5-6 pairs; petioles 4-6 mm long. Inflorescences terminal, a bunch containing 2-4 spikes, 0.5 - 1.5 cm long; bracts foliaceous, lanceolate-elliptic, acute, 4-6 x 2-4 mm, with prominent midrib and hirsute margins; bracteoles 2, linear-elliptic, acuminate, 4-5 x 1-2

mm. Calyx-lobes 5, subequal, 5-7 x ca 1 mm, filiform, 3-5 mm long; stigma simple. Capsules united at basal half, hispid. Corolla-tube 4-6 mm long, pubescent, pale white with pink dots, linear, compressed, ellipsoid, pointed at tip, 4-5 x ca 1 mm, glabrous or puberulous; seeds 4, bilipped; lower lip 3-4 mm long and upper lip 2-3 mm across. Stamens 4; filaments 1-2 mm long; anthers ca 1 mm long. Ovary 1 - 2 x ca 1 cm; style straight (Fig. 1 A-E).

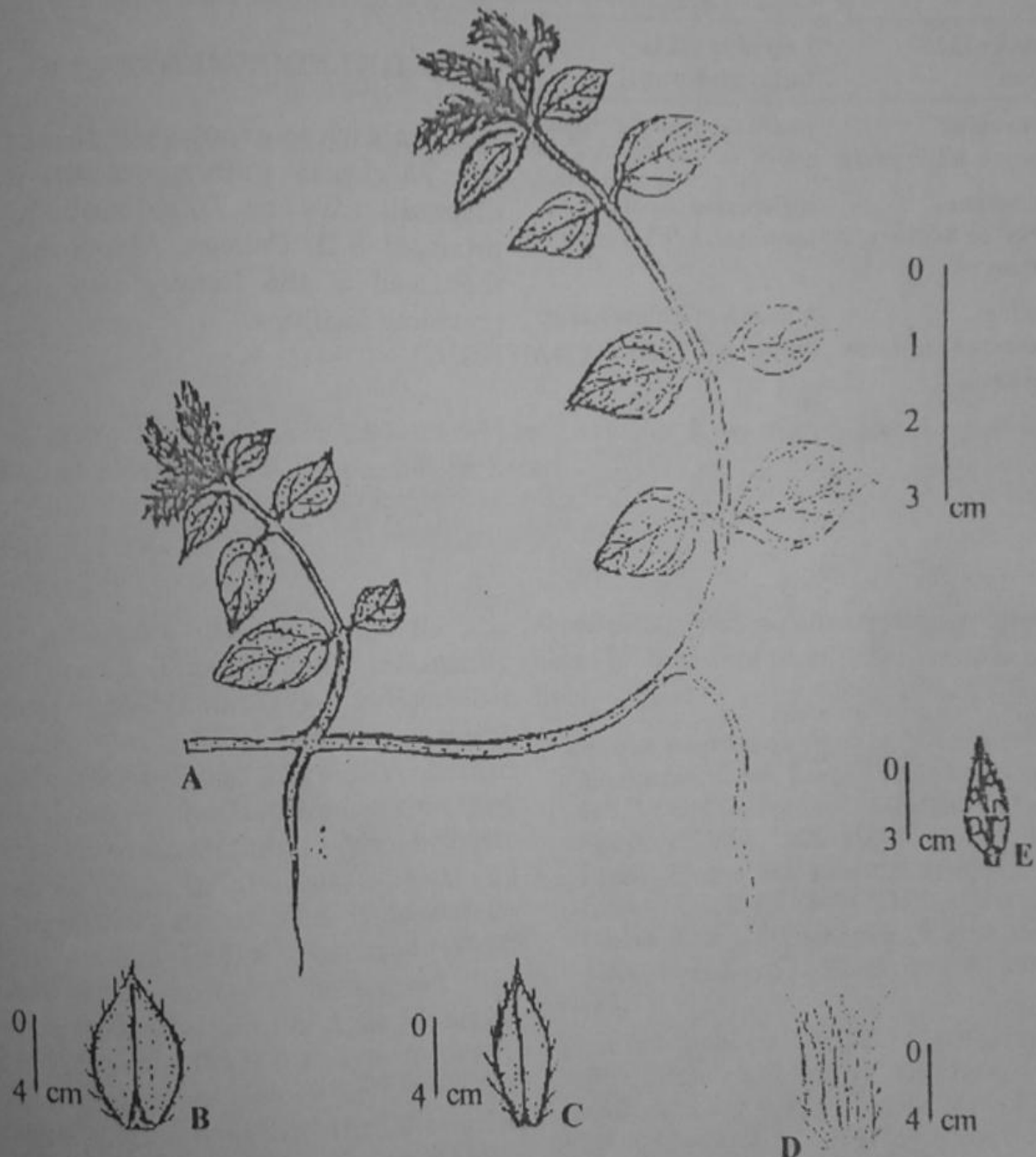


Fig. 1. *Lepidagathis balakrishnani* Remadevi * Binoj Kumar sp. nova: A. Habit with inflorescence, B. Bract, C. Bracteole, D. Calyx, E. Fruit split open.

Fl. & Fr. : December-January.

Habitat : Rare, occurs in the crevices of rocks and also as lithophytes

This species is allied to *Lepidagathis spinosa* Wt., but shows the following differences :

Bracts with hirsute hairs

Bracts with glandular hairs

Etymology : The species epithet is in honour of Dr. N.P. Balakrishnan, Joint Director (Retd.) Botanical survey of India, Coimbatore in recognition of his contributions in plant taxonomy.

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Lepidagathis spinosa	Lepidagathis balakrishnanii
Leaf-margins pubescent, mucronate	Leaf-margins glabrous, acute
Inflorescences terminal or axillary, 2-3 cm long	Inflorescences always terminal, 0.5-1.5 cm long
A bunch of inflorescence contains 6-9 spikes	A bunch of inflorescence contains 2-4 spikes